

Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

Like the companion volume by Olson this one is brilliantly written and amazingly engaging (see my review of Olson's *Against Calvinism* here- <http://archive.org/download/olson/olson.pdf>). Yet the criticisms I leveled against that volume for lacking an index and a bibliography also apply, regrettably, to Horton's work as well.

Horton's work offers readers a very fine primer on Reformed theology in its Calvinist form. He discusses the essence of Calvinism, the human condition, election, atonement, calling and perseverance, the Christian life, Christian missions, and finally, the strengths and weaknesses of Calvinism.

Horton suffers, unfortunately, a rather narrow and inaccurate apprehension of the Reformed tradition, though. He writes

Calvin was not the only shaper of the Reformed tradition (p. 29)

and he's right. But when he lists Bucer and Bullinger, Knox and Lasco, Zanchi and Vermigli without mentioning Zwingli (whom, so far as I can tell, he mentions not so much as a single time in the entire book) he betrays an unfortunate unfamiliarity with the roots of the Reformed tradition. Reformed theology didn't begin with Bucer or Bullinger; or Calvin. Of course if there were an index I could confirm this huge gap but, alas, I have to depend on my own careful reading of the work and I may simply have missed Zwingli's name. Yet even if I have missed it, the fact that it is absent here, at the very place it surely should have appeared, is telling.

Notwithstanding that tremendous gaffe, Horton's work is a series of invaluable analyses of Calvin's chief thoughts concerning humanity and Deity. In particular, his explication of the accusation made against Calvinism that it makes God the 'author of sin' is really useful (p.48). And he offers some terribly witty and quotable observations. For instance

The fatal accommodation to the religion of self-help always begins with the unbiblical view of the sinful condition (p. 51).

Commendable too is his explanation of election, which he sagely calls a 'mystery'. But the best part of the book is chapter seven, 'Calvinism and Christian Missions' (pp. 151ff). Here he shows that Calvinism has in fact been and remains one of the most important sources of Christian missionaries with none less than the likes of Thomas Mayhew, David Brainerd, David Livingstone, Robert Morrison and Jonathan Goforth stemming from reformed churches and being practitioners of reformed theology.

Amazingly, Horton notes,

With growing interest in Calvinism in Southern Baptist circles, some leaders have expressed alarm that it will dampen the denomination's enthusiasm for evangelism and missions. ... [But] the Southern Baptist Convention sponsors "about 5000 home missionaries" and "more than 5000 foreign missionaries". For a denomination of sixteen million, this comes to approximately "0.000625 missionaries per capita".

By contrast, the 310,000 member Presbyterian Church in America ... has "about 600 foreign missionaries". That is 0.001935 foreign missionaries per capita commissioned and supported by the PCA. ... Thus, the PCA supports three times more foreign missionaries per capita than the SBC supports foreign and domestic missions combined (p. 162).

And

... the PCA gives twice as much per dollar to international missions compared with the SBC (p. 162).

So much, then, for the absurd assertion that Calvinism leads to anti-missionary sentiments.

Horton concludes his defense of Calvinism with a listing of its strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities and threats.

Those who are interested in Calvin's theology as it has manifested itself in his spiritual heirs could probably not do better than this mildly short volume. As frustrating as it is that the father of Reformed theology, Huldrych Zwingli, is treated as something of a red-headed step child and ignored completely, the book remains exceedingly helpful.

In comparison to the companion volume by Olson, this one would receive a B from me if it were graded as an essay and Olson's a C.

Readers, though, truly interested in the theology of Calvin should read Calvin himself and not 'about' Calvin. Introductions and summaries are useful and they have their place, but all such efforts are never as good as reading the sources from which they are drawn. And Calvin, a veritable theological Himalaya, cannot be fairly or rightly or thoroughly understood by anyone unwilling to invest the necessary time and effort in reading him, himself. *Ad fontes!* If Horton has managed to stir interest in Calvin and if it causes students, pastors, theologians, and interested lay-folk to pick up Calvin's commentaries and letters and tractates and theology, then he will have really managed something quite important.

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